

2005-02-14 Loving Kindness

Thu, 7/16 4:27PM • 40:11

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

goodwill, kindness, loving kindness, people, buddha, person, meditation, love, cultivate, loving kindness practice, clinging, guided meditation, happiness, called, discourse, happy, easy, beings, buddhism, teachers

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Since partly because Today is Valentine's Day, I thought it would be nice to talk about metta or loving kindness. And I'd like to begin by reading the discourse on loving kindness that code goes back to the Buddha. And most is called the discourse on loving kindness. And it's often referred to as kind of as one of the primary sources for the practice of loving kindness. However, in its thrush during the main emphasis of the discourse, is not actually about loving kindness. And that's often overlooked. And little bit times a little bit the fault of the translators in English but but not too much. The discourse is not about loving kindness per se talks about it, certainly as it gives a lot of space to it. But the discourse is really about becoming free. It's about becoming awakened and the discourse is framed around, what is it that helps a person become free? What is it helps a person become awakened and it turns out that developing loving kindness or having a loving kind, heart, attitude is one of the ways One of the very important foundations for the movement towards freedom. So, the discourse goes like this to reach to reach the state of peace and this is synonymous with Enlightenment or becoming free or awakened, becoming released to reach the state of peace, those skilled in the good, should be capable and upright, straightforward and easy to speak to. Gentle and not proud, contented and easily supported, living lightly and with few duties, wise and with census calmed, not arrogant, and without greed for supporters, and they should not do the least thing the wise would criticize. They should reflect, May all beings be happy and secure. May all beings be happy at heart. all living beings, whether they're weak or strong, tall, large, medium or short, tiny or big, seen or unseen. Near or distant, born or to be born, may they all be happy. Let no one deceive another, or despise anyone anywhere, that no one through anger or aversion, wish for others to suffer as a mother would risk her own life to protect her child or only child. So toward all living beings should one cultivate a boundless heart. With loving kindness for the whole world, she meant when should one cultivate a boundless heart, above below and all around without obstruction without hate, and without ill will, standing or walking, sitting or lying down? As long as one is alert, they won't stay with this recollection. This is called the sublime abiding here and now whoever is virtuous, endowed with vision, not taken by views,

and having overcome all greed for sensual pleasure will not be reborn again, will be free. And so about maybe over half the discourse, maybe two thirds of it is about loving kindness and with the instruction to reflect on all beings in a kind way, wishing for them wishing for others to be happy. It's a wish. It's an aspiration that the heart can have, our minds can have, when we encounter someone else, we might wish for them to be happy. Or we might wish everyone to be happy or to be safe. Secure that we're here in this translation. And the it's not a moral imperative that person do this. However, in the context of this, this discourse is the person what if a person wants to attain liberation Once it becomes free This is one of the ways to do that is to cultivate a kind heart. There's something about the nature of freedom, the kind of spiritual freedom that goes hand in hand with having some kind of kindness or kind regard of goodwill towards others develop goodwill. Now, I know that there's plenty of people who think that they can cultivate a spiritual life without being concerned about other people. Some people, for many reasons, won't just be left alone and kind of meditation people do meditation in particular, they sit down and close their eyes and the last thing you want to do is relate to anybody that happens sometimes. And but here, having a relationship of goodwill is taken to be essential for part of the process to becoming free. The image that used for the kind of goodwill disgust here is that of a mother protecting our child or only child. And so it's kind of sometimes called maternal or parental love, the kind of love that wants to take care of or protect or bring security and happiness to the people under their protection under their care. It's sometimes pointed out that in spiritual circles, there are different kinds of love, that are sometimes champion. And sometimes, there is a kind of love that is quite passionate. Like a person has passionate love towards some deity. And kind of an idea is to have all this love and to merge with a deity with a being forget oneself in it and it's kind of just grand love affair kind of love enough romantic love is the right word, but sometimes, the way manifests itself The way it feels almost sexual and the kind of passion and the absorption and losing oneself. The love that's being talked about here is not one where we lose ourselves in the process or merge in the kind of forget ourselves or disappear in the process, but rather to love that kind of, again, like a mother, who's watching over so distinct and separate from the child, but is there to have the presence of mind to take care of the child and be concerned with a child's goodwill. So for me, at least, that image is one that's much more peaceful. The parent needs to stay somewhat balanced, sane, peaceful presence. If the parent loses, that loses him or herself in the child, the child's gonna be in trouble in various ways. And so there's a tremendous outpouring of goodwill in an ideal parent, but there's also a sense of being somewhat distinct in there to be offered. care are calm or peaceful in the process. And little bit of makes sense because the process of becoming free in Buddhism is one that requires us to stay present. Stay Cognizant and aware of what's going on the idea of a free of losing ourselves in something, abandoning ourselves in something, whether it's, you know, anything at all might be nice in various contexts. But it's not really that helpful along the path to freedom. Because freedom requires us to stay alert, aware, Cognizant to what is happening all the time. There's a lot of different states, you know, so called spiritual states or altered states that spiritual seekers will enter into and go into, and it's interesting that Buddhism has this big map of mental states spiritual states, meditation states that you know, maps out but certain states that not covered and not included in this. So for example, demonic states, where there again was kind of a loss of consciousness, loss of awareness where, perhaps like, you sense as the spirit of an animal enters into the person and the person comes out of

that experience. And does anybody remember what happened or did it drop suddenly? What happens then is that we're having some difficulty with a speaker. And, and so what happens is it has a mind of its own. And so it goes up and down. And so what you need to do is just move up and down with it. Now Now we're up. We're up. We're up now. I think we will. I think we're too high. No, that's good. Okay. Sorry, be patient while we get it all sorted out. So this is this The value that Buddhism puts on being present. And being clear what's going on with time is also comes across here and the way it champions love or loving kindness or goodwill. That is also very important as calm presence. Here, here also, one of the things I find remarkable about the goodwill, the attitude loving kindness that is talked about in Buddhism is that it doesn't require an object. It doesn't require having a person that we want the possibilities to turn the speaker off over there. Do you know how to do that? Yeah, you know, we have turned off and if you those of you out there can't hear, you can move. Because there's lots of space. And so let's see if that's so now we have to go up a little bit. Now you could go up so the other speakers can carry the load. So let's see. I can't stop. Listen. I was That is that work, repeat. Boom. That's, that's, that's a little bit feedback now. This is good now. This team okay. Should we try that? So it's off there now. So let's see how that is and see if it makes a difference. We haven't hit we have suspect this that speaker and so if we can you hear okay? work. Okay. So the, the loving kindness that's talked about doesn't require a person as the object, it often has it and often that's part of the strength of it and the beauty of it. But it doesn't require an object. And what what, in my own experience knowing my own discovery of this feeling of goodwill or loving kindness happen somewhat spontaneous Like I my original introduction to Buddhism my first years of practice was in the Zen tradition. And they never talked about loving kindness that I knew of. Did they ever tell about that? No, they did it. I never heard of it. No, no, don't say anything about it. And, and then I went to Thailand and Burma to practice. And, and my teachers there didn't talk about much because I was doing intensive mindfulness practice. But in the context of doing intensive mindfulness practice. At some point, all the tremendous amount of love and goodwill welled up inside of me. And I said, watch this. And it feels good. And it felt very joyful, very light, very free. It happened to me in particular, when the experience of impermanence was really strong and meditation, and a meditative experience of everything kind of is dissolving, disappearing, solving, disappearing. And so people get afraid At this point in meditation, things are disappearing. And for me, it was a little bit the opposite that it was just very joyful to have this experience. And with that joy came this tremendous sense of love and well being. And it's like it was anything I turned my attention to. I just fell in love with, you know, where there was an issue where there was a sound or no purses, everything was just, you know, I just felt all this goodwill and love towards everything it was, it was. And I thought it was interesting. And I didn't make much too much of it. They just interesting. Nice. And then after practicing in Southeast Asia, I came back to America and did a three month retreat in IMS, Massachusetts, for the first time with Western teachers. Little bit odd, isn't it? Yeah. So if you're too troubled by it, they will try turning it off and I'll try to speak loudly. We've met we've been patient enough with it, the speaker so when I came to IMS I don't know when but after a few weeks into the retreats, the teachers came into the hall one day during one of the sittings, and said, we're now going to do a guided meditation on loving kindness. And I couldn't believe it. Because I've been doing Zen practice all these years. And the last thing you want to do is teach people teachers don't talk into notational during meditation, and just a stare, kind of, you know, silence

sitting. And when I was in Asia, the teachers didn't do guided meditations, mostly we just sat I sat alone My room, and there was no guided meditation at all there. And but if my first contact with this was when I went to IMS, in the middle of this retreat, the teachers showed up and said, we're going to talk during the city while you're meditating. We're going to talk and we're going to do this guided meditation If you don't like what, you know, that was a completely foreign idea to me, and so I just did you know, what some people do when I tried to do guided meditations, they tune I tuned the teacher out No, I'm not gonna do that. And this sets in a way that was sentimental, you know, it's kind of sentimental kind of approach to Buddhism and it's kind of artificial, going to try to arouse loving kindness and make it happen and love doesn't work that way. Love is something that kind of is there naturally or can be I don't know how it happens, but you don't admit a manufacturer that seems completely insincere. And also disturbing. My meditation was not very appreciated. So I just tuned them out. And then edited retreats mine along. The same thing happened has happened in Burma is that as I started kind of relaxing very deeply, and crusts of the heart started to Dissolve, and kind of the, the fixation in the mind and heart that kind of often is an obstruction for love. When those as they started falling away, then what seemingly is kind of almost a innate quality of the heart, qualities of love or well being a joy started rising and bubbling up. And then when the teachers came into the hall to do loving kindness to Oh, that's what they're talking about. And then I just piggyback I just kind of went around has to say, and then when they did it, they were just speaking to me through what was already happening. It wasn't about trying to make something happen. It was it was already happening and I got to kind of like a little, you know, little encouragement or little kind of, you know, got to indulge in a little bit more, you know, it was kind of nice. And it's a beautiful thing. To have goodwill to have loving kindness for Anybody, and for nobody, to have it for no reason at all, to just sit there and have this, this feeling of goodwill, you think of the light of love. It's not so easy to have it. And it's not easy because we tend to be so fixated so preoccupied with a lot of our concerns, a lot of our fears, a lot of our desires and ambitions where we want. Having a lot of wants is one of the primary obstacles to feeling loved, to feeling happy. That's what you know, a lot of people say, right? So if we're constantly going on wanting things, then it's hard to relax and let something inside of us, come out of us. bubble up. If we're always trying to fix things, or plan or remember, it's hard to make space in the psyche for something to bubble up from inside of us. If we're always trying to protect ourselves, looking out to have you know, or building ourselves up or always trying to get something from what going on, you know, there's no space, we're kind of still the psychic space. And so something can bubble up. In, sometimes in life, like for example, in, in meditation, it goes really well and deep, there's letting go of a lot of the fixations, a lot of preoccupations, a lot of the fear, a lot of the resistance, a lot of things that cover over what's deep inside. And that was demon side has a chance more and more to come out surface. And one of the things that can come out is the kind of love or lightness or delight, or goodwill, that sometimes is connected to loving kindness or sometimes in our tradition called called it called loving kindness. One of the qualities of this loving kindness in politics called meta is that it's concerned for the welfare of others. It's concerned for their happiness. It's not the same as compassion. Compassion is also concerned about someone's welfare because About the welfare of someone who's suffering, and wanting them to be free of that suffering. goodwill, or loving kindness here is, is a little bit different in that the person doesn't have to be suffering. But we just know that someone's there

we want them to be happy. Not so it's more we want some positive experience for them, as opposed to you know absence of suffering. To make it may they be happy, may they be peaceful. The word meta is a cognate or is closely connected word for friend with the word is Mita. So it's a kind of idea of friendliness friendly goodwill to someone else with someone else. Now that someone else can be yourself and in fact, the way that the minute is done, the loving kindness practice is done as a formal meditation practice. And it's done in a sequence is a classic sequence of how it's done. And it's first done by cultivating loving kindness towards oneself having goodwill towards oneself. And for some people, that's phenomenally healing. To do that. It's a radical thing for some psyches to turn away or drop, the self critical illness, the self loathing the self, you know, all this, all these problems, we have ourselves to drop it or turn it around, and instead have a sense of goodwill and love and delight, appreciation for ourselves. That's where it begins. And then it goes to someone who's a friend. Next, Next. Next, it goes to someone who's a benefactor. Someone who's helped you somehow in your life. Then it goes to a friend. And then it goes to a neutral person. And then it goes to the classic expression is enemy. And the West we don't like to use that word. So we say a difficult person. And so that's that sequence that direction it goes from self, benefactor friend, neutral person and difficult person. In ancient world, the assumption here, it's explicit in the teachings is that you start where it's easiest. And so the assumption is that for everybody, it's easiest to start with themselves. So you that's what you know. It's obvious right? That's where you should. So there's an ancient story time of the Buddha about King great king to live there. And it helps a story if you fill in some of it may imagine some of it that he was some with arrogance. You know, everybody was in the king land, a strong, great conquer, Emperor kind of guy. And he you know, is used to people, everybody kind of Just up to him and revered him and thought he was the best and the greatest. And maybe it was a bit dangerous for your life not to do that. So that's what he was used to. And so one day he's out on the he was staying together with a queen in the upper palace. And the king said to the queen, is there anyone more dear to you than yourself? So here we just got anybody more important to you than yourself? He's standing there waiting for the answer, right? The husband, the king, you know anybody you know? And she says, No, Your Majesty. There is no one More dear to me than myself. She then asked him the same question. Is there anyone more dear to you than yourself, dear? No Queen, there is no one more dear to me than myself. The King then left the palace and went to the Buddha. Maybe in the story you should imagine, the king left in a huff and went to the Buddha. On arriving, he bowed and sat to one side, the kingdom told the Buddha of his exchange with a queen. So this is important enough that he wanted to check this out with the Buddha. understanding the importance of this, the Buddha then stated, if you surveyed the entire world, you would find no one more deer than yourself. Since each person is most deer to themselves, made those who love themselves, not bring harm to anyone. So there's a wonderful thing here that Buddha is doing. It's also he's talking to King has blood on his hands, because you're on conquering, right? So a little bit that's all you have to remember he makes this little purse. So adversity and last story. So first he agrees with a queen that everyone is most dear to themselves. And then he does something that Buddha likes to do. He says, you can kind of like you put someone else in. So put yourself in other people's shoes, kind of exchange of using others to yourself to compare to compare yourself to others or understand others for understanding yourself. Since that is true, since each person each person loves themselves. They shouldn't harm anybody

else. Conclusion since you love yourself and other people love themselves the same as you love yourself. For the desire for their own happiness, same goodwill, same care for themselves as you have for yourself, okay? Do not harm any of them. So the assumption here is that it's a worthwhile as appropriate as expected, that people share some kind of love or goodwill, friendliness towards themselves. For some people I know it's easy to have goodwill or compassion for everybody but themselves. For some reason this person here doesn't count. Like, we're not really, you know, everybody else is nice humans. And now who knows who this person is, you know, it's like, somehow we don't count, you know? And, but each person Buddhism each person counts incense equally. Everyone's worthy of love of kindness, including ourselves. So we start with ourselves. Some people here in the West, I know take the principle of starting loving kindness back is where it's easiest and start with a benefactor or start with a friend. And then, and then they somehow follow the sequence, they kind of mix it all up, according to what works best for them. So hopefully you don't have to wait for themselves, hopefully, hopefully, they are not their own, most difficult person. You don't have to wait that long. But eventually, the idea is to do all these five categories of beings in loving kindness, practice, learn how to cultivate an open hearted, generous heart, a friendly heart, to all these categories of people. And then the practices is to do is to do what's called breaking down the barriers. And that is, in a sense to imagine yourself, a benefactor, a friend, a neutral person, and a difficult person, all standing in front of you, and then cultivating an equal, loving kindness to each one. So there's no distinction between any other you have the same level of goodwill to each each of them. One way of understanding this, which I think maybe is helpful, and I think, to me it's inspiring is that we start with what's easy. Start to where love is easy. Hopefully everyone has someplace to love. It's easy. So no, so I know one person did loving kindness, some people who do loving kindness practice, and they started with our dog. And, and then so, you know, it's kind of cliché. Some people say that, you know, once they do that a dog, then they try to see themselves in the way their dog sees them. unconditioned love, you know, the dog doesn't care. If you come home grumpy, or, you know, you didn't take out the garbage or whatever the dog loves, loves you anyway. So, the solution people do the dog, but the idea is to take what you can do. So do yourself or do your family or do the person you love. And then and then universalize it. So you don't ask, not asked to deny or let go of your love for other people. But you're asked to clarify it to purify it, and then to universalize it, so everyone can be in that field, everyone can be included. Now part of that task is to purify it, to clarify that love. And it's very common that most people when they love each other, that there's a level of attachment, or clinging, or fear in that relationship. And so much so that some people, it's inconceivable how they could love without some attachment or some clinging as part of it. We're clinging to being seen a certain way we're clinging to it being getting love in return. We're clinging to that person's presence. We're clinging to it, you know, all kinds of things we're clinging to, to the pleasure of it to the joy of it to the to the validation we get from it to all kinds of things. The task in a in a spiritual path that's lead to freedom. The task is to find love, discover that capacity of love that has no clinging in it. So that's a big challenge for people in intimate relationships are not an intimate, intimate, intimate relation who wants to be, there can be so much clinging. So the spiritual path and moving towards freedom is to somehow try to separate out the wheat from the chaff to separate out, you know, so that the clinging is not, you know, part of our goodwill, part of our love. It's really hard to see. So, part of the function of loving

kindness practice is to help us begin discovering a kind of goodwill that hopefully is without clinging without expectation, without demand, just a kind of natural, easy goodwill. Doing loving kindness practice does entail having a wish, in the wishes that have some wishing someone else happiness. If there's an expectation for that, Then it's considered to be a form of clinging. So how to have the wish, kind of open ended wish, without expecting it without being disappointed if it doesn't happen. There's kind of boundless open goodwill made me kind of like you say in theistic religions, May that person be happy, God willing. So just kind of Oh, you know, so I, this is my wish, but I'm not in charge and I control causes and conditions that are going to come to come together. And it may or may not happen, but it's my expression. When I've done loving kindness practice, one of the things that's helped me a lot of little images, the idea that's helped me is to remember a time in my life where I heard that a third party someone who's not present had inquired about my wheelchair. Someone even someone who I didn't expect cared about me. You know, housekeeping he Okay, let's see what's he up to And in I feel kind of a happiness or the light knowing someone else has that kind of nuff care of this goodwill towards me that they ask about me when I'm not there. That happiness that I feel was a has been a guide for me to then feeling happiness or feeling sense of lightness or delight. When I'm doing loving kindness practice when I'm doing it to myself and I'm doing it to others. That reminder Oh, there's there's there's a possibility of certain Lightness of Being or ease or don't or inspiration that comes with a beautiful thing happens when someone has goodwill is concerned with the welfare of others. There is a tendency sometimes for people to think that all of our personal problems all the hindrances their spiritual life, can be overcome by doing mindfulness practice. And if you just be mindful enough, everything will resolve itself. So there's a very interesting dialogue that goes back to the Buddha was in. And this is maybe, I don't know, maybe this is this dialogue has to do with a tree spirit. So the Buddha was somewhere in this Tree Spirits came to see the Buddha. And a Tree Spirits said, basically this thing, mindfulness is all you need. The free spirit said, things are always good. For one who is mindful, the mindful one grows and happiness each day improves. For one who is mindful, the mindful one is free from hate. The Buddha then replied Repeating some of what the Spirit said. Things are always good for one who is mindful, the mindful one will grow and happiness. Each day improves for one who is mindful, but the mindful one is not free from hate. The person who day and night delights in harmlessness and has loving kindness towards all beings is the one who has no hate for anyone. So, mindfulness here it says not enough. But in order to overcome hate real well, loving kindness is the antidote is the medicine. So that to cultivate to develop it to make space for it. So the idea of cultivating and developing a capacity for love for goodwill is a very important aspect of Buddhist practice. I found that invaluable for myself, and a lot of people have found it really valuable. This suggestion is that Sooner or later as you develop a path of freedom, goodwill, a sense of goodwill, you have to make space when you're least have to allow for it to happen. But perhaps you can leave it to chance or wait that long. But it's actually kind of pre emptive a little bit by seeing what you could do to cultivate it and develop it. So there is a meditation practice, called visitation on loving kindness that's been done in order to develop it and grow it. That meditation loving kindness is the companion meditation to the mindfulness meditation here at IMC, or in our, in the passionate world. So two primary meditations that we do is mindfulness and loving kindness. loving kindness is understood to be the source of all healthy relatedness or healthy emotional related feelings or healthy relatedness.

We have towards other others. loving kindness is the source for feeling compassion. loving kindness is a source for feeling sympathetic joy in others. Lending kindness is the is the source for feeling what's called grandmotherly, equinix, grandmotherly love. Friendly Love is the kind of love that grandmother feels for her grandchildren. But the grandmothers seen it all before. And so doesn't get caught up in anxious dramas around this young children the way the parents did. So it's kind of more even balanced. Economists love the grandmother. I want to read you the benefits. There's many benefits to do loving kindness practice, but there's a list that is kind of nice. One sleeps happily, one wakes happily, one has no bad dreams, one is loved by others, one is loved by nonhumans. One is protected by the devices, fire poison or swords one touch one, one's mind becomes becomes concentrated quickly. One's complexion becomes clear. One dies with a mind free from confusion. And if no higher attainment is reached, when one dies when, when is reborn in the heavenly realms. That's pretty good list of things doing it. When sleeps happily and wakes happily. Couple of other small quotes and then we'll stop The loving kindness is called meta is called loving kindness because it is loving. It refers to tender or lubricating love is also known as meta because it arises in one's relationship to a friend meet. The characteristic of loving kindness is to promote well being. It functions to prefer well being. Its manifestation is the removal of annoyance. Its proximate cause is seeing the loveliness of beings to see the loveliness of beings and then a great expression. So look at someone and see their loveliness. You know, it's kinda like people watching but you don't look you know what you're looking for is what's beautiful, not you know, externally. But can you look kind of through their through their eyes, okay, look under the skin and see what's lovely. And the idea here is that everyone, as loveliness says, inner beauty. Maybe it's covered over forgotten their know about themselves, but to see it, to see the preciousness in other people to see that begin seeing being awakening to it is the proximate cause for loving kindness. it succeeds. When it makes ill will subside. And it fails when it produces selfish affection. loving kindness towards the world is happiness for those whose hearts then kindly to all beings. Do you really get beautiful loving kindness towards the world is happiness for those whose heart hearts then kindly to all beings. So if your heart can bend kindly toward all beings, then if you have loving kindness, that kindness will be your happiness. So, maybe the two of you know some of this happiness. And if you know the possibility of happiness, the capacity of happiness that's in every person's heart, may it be your at your delightful aspiration, your inspired aspiration to be a promoter of happiness in all beings. So that Everyone can be happy and sleep happily wake up happily. Thank you very much